

# WOODLAND CONFERENCE & ARTISTS FOR NATURE

Friday 28th March 2025, Norbury Village Hall, 10am - 4pm



## CONFERENCE REPORT

Middle Marches Community Land Trust's first Woodland Conference was attended by over 130 delegates, from both within and outside the sector and supported by the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

A wide variety of speakers spoke about their roles as woodland advocates and the measures they are taking to meet conservation targets and tackle diminishing biodiversity.

Dr Richard Keymer, Chair of MMCLT, opened the event by welcoming delegates before introducing local artist Kate Chitham, who talked about the newly formed Marches Artists for Nature, a group of local artists who put the theme of nature at the heart of their work.

The morning session of talks was kicked off by Will Fitzpatrick from The Tree Council, who discussed the importance of hedgerows in the landscape and shared research on hedgerow tree populations within Shropshire's farmland.

Dr Keith Kirby, researcher from Oxford University followed, telling the story of woodland ground flora through the ages and how geography, geology and climate affect this, and how we might mitigate present day challenges.

Peter Aspin, dairy farmer from North Shropshire, then discussed how he uses agroforestry on his farm to provide more favourable conditions both for his cows and for biodiversity, as well as producing additional crops like walnuts, for income.

The morning session was concluded by Patrick Cosgrove from the Redlake Valley Community Benefit Society, who talked about the fascinating history of quillits and how his shareholders came to buy some in Brineddin Wood, Chapel Lawn, South Shropshire.

Lunchtime gave the opportunity for both networking and perusing the artwork on display, provided by Marches Artists for Nature. Six members exhibited: Kate Chitham, Tom Davies, Lucy Gaze, Sarah Gillard, Sarah Jameson and Simon Jameson with a contribution of sales put towards MMCLT's nature recovery fund.

After lunch, the afternoon session opened with a short film 'Life in The Coppice' produced by Robin Fellows-Weir as part of CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Heroes project. Richard Thomason, who featured in the film and is woodland manager in Westhope, near Craven Arms then answered questions from the floor.



**Shropshire  
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## (REPORT CONTINUED)

Douglas Purce followed, talking about the Shropshire Hills National Landscape's Ancient Woodland Restoration project, providing a clear definition of ancient woodland before explaining why it needs restoring and the many steps and processes that need to be taken before restoration can actually begin.

Then David Reeve and Russell Critchley from the Small Woods Association spoke about the development of the Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project, describing how the project was implemented and the benefits that have been demonstrated to both the people involved and nature itself.

Finally, Nick Rowles from Shropshire Council's Trees Outside Woodland discussed Community Tree nurseries and their important role in providing trees of local provenance for local projects as well as health and social opportunities for people involved.

The day concluded with a Q&A session hosted by Dr Richard Keymer, who gave thanks to all speakers, delegates and those involved in putting together the event.

**Links to all presentations on the day can be found at:**

**<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/woodland-conference-presentations>**

**To find out more about Marches Artists for Nature visit:**

**<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/AfN>**

**Shropshire Hills National Landscape Trust**

**[www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/help-to-look-after/shropshire-hills-landscape-trust](http://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/help-to-look-after/shropshire-hills-landscape-trust)**

*"Just wanted to say thank you for organising the conference. I thought it was extremely well put together"*

*"Thought it was a lovely day. Great speakers, fab food, nice to have the artists there also"*

*"I simply wanted to thank you and everyone involved in organising the conference yesterday. I thoroughly enjoyed the day, finding all of the speakers very engaging and the whole event exceptionally well organised and inspiring"*

*"Just to say what a lovely conference enjoyed it greatly and learnt a lot"*

*"Just a quick email to say thanks for organising such a great conference"*

## ARTISTS FOR NATURE EXHIBITION

Kate Chitham: [katechithamfineart.co.uk](http://katechithamfineart.co.uk)

Tom Davies: [tomdavies.com](http://tomdavies.com)

Lucy Gaze: [wanderinggaze.co.uk](http://wanderinggaze.co.uk)

Sarah Gillard: [sarahgillard.com](http://sarahgillard.com)

Sarah Jameson: [sarahjameson.co.uk](http://sarahjameson.co.uk)

Simon Jameson: [1066creations.co.uk](http://1066creations.co.uk)

